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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
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WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Iran, Syria/Agha Khan Foundation, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestinian Territories (6/16-18)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on (6/16) reported President Asad's meeting with Syrian official media figures. President Asad discussed on Thursday (6/15) with representatives of the government-run media the role of information, and mechanisms and conceptions that might contribute to its development. Minister of Information Dr. Mohsen Bilal attended the meeting. Among the topics of the meetings were the importance of initiatives from those working in the media, of encouraging dialogue, of constructive criticism, and of solutions to obstructions to media action. The gathering touched upon the need to invest in the information sector, to clarify Syria's interior and exterior media policies and to pay attention to the preparation and qualification of media professionals.

Papers also reported President Asad's meeting with Ismaili spiritual leader Prince Karim Agha Khan, which focused on the current investment climate of in Syria. Talks also dealt with future projects of the Agha Khan network in Syria. President Asad and Prince Karim also discussed the local, regional and international economies, according to a Presidential statement. The Agha Khan Foundation for Development recently established a national institution for small loans in Syria, considered the first in the Middle East. The foundation has made about 900 million SP of loans to about 15 thousand persons. The spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims is the head of a large network of charitable foundations and companies that operate mostly in the third world.

On Syrian-Iranian relations, papers reported that General Hasan Turkumani, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Armed Forces and Defense Minister, and his Iranian counterpart, Brigadier General Mostafa Mohammad Najjar, have signed a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation between Syria and Iran. The memorandum provides for bolstering relations between the two countries; maintaining peace, security, and stability in the region; freeing the region from weapons of mass destruction; and conclusively eliminating tension and instability. The memorandum also provides for strengthening defense cooperation, speeding up the implementation of relevant agreements and contracts, and setting up a joint committee to follow up and implement joint efforts and consolidate cooperation on defense issues. The Iranian Defense Minister

stressed that Syria and Iran are two important countries in the region and the Islamic world. He pointed out that relations between Tehran and Damascus could serve as a model for Islamic countries in all fields.

End of Summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad discusses current climate of investment in Syria and future projects with Prince Karim Agha Khan. Talks also touch upon local, regional and international economic situations" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/18)

"Lebanese MPs and figures criticize movements by foreign Ambassadors against the background of revelation of the Mossad network: They serve Israeli interests" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/18)

"In light of confessions by members of the Mossad network arrested in Lebanon, Lebanese fear the extent of Israeli penetration. The case will be referred to the Security Council. Lahoud: Israel seeks revenge against the Lebanese resistance" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/17)

"The Palestinian dialogue makes progress. The EU approves aid to Palestinians. Palestinians consider it insufficient" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/18)

"Finally, a European mechanism for helping Palestinians awaits the Quartet's approval. Israeli calls for coordination with Abbas. Fatah casts doubts on Israeli intentions" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/17)

"Italy commences withdrawal of its forces from Iraq. A US soldier killed, two reported missing in Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/16)

"American annoyance at the Italian withdrawal from Iraq. 11 Iraqis killed, 25 injured in the Baghdad blast" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/17)

"President Asad discusses role of state and society in the current reform process with Assistant Secretary General of UNDP. Asad calls for pursuing objectivity and credibility" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/16)

"A memo of understanding for defense cooperation is inked between Syria and Iran. Minister of Defense Tourkmani depicts relations with Iran as strategic, saying that Iran's force is an asset for us" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/16)

"Revealing the Mossad network in Lebanon boosts the Lebanese resistance. Lahoud: Investigations are continuing and saboteurs will be punished" (Government-owned Tishreen, 6/16)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Losing Bets"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (6/17): "The situations in Afghanistan and Iraq prove the failure of the US policy drawn up by neoconservatives....

"It is obvious that the US Administration has not learned from the mistakes it has made in more than one place in the world, from Somalia to Afghanistan to Iraq. The evidence is that it continues to adopt the same military-political approach.... Despite the American failure, the US Administration continues to rely on the same theories, from Iraq to Palestine to Lebanon,

and seeks to plunge the Arab region into unconstructive instability to please Israel and its expansionist plan and to serve the Greater Middle East plan....

"Washington, either out of ignorance or arrogance, does not take into consideration the factor of peoples, who have managed to stand fast and foil foreign plans.... The Bush administration today knows that it failed in its wagers on isolating Syria, and it will perhaps find out soon that it is unable to subjugate Syria or ignore the central role that Damascus plays in the region's security and stability, and that dialogue is the only way to solve all problems and differences...."

"Such Desecration Requires A Response"

Muhammad Ali Buzah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (6/16): "Washington's sadistic and despicable justification of the Israeli massacre on the Gaza beach and subsequent crimes means that there is no longer any hope or positive sign that the Bush administration will act rationally and turn, during its remaining time in office, into a fair mediator, a factor of peace, stability and calm, or a supporter of justice in this troubled and volatile part of the world or elsewhere....

"The US Administration has sold itself out to the devil and become, just like Israel, a factor of tension, explosion, and unrest and an enemy that harbors every evil for this Arab nation; it effectively participates in aggression against our

nation and in crimes that seek to annihilate it and regularly violate its sanctities....

"This situation must not remain without an Arab response.... What we need today, more than ever before, is the formulation of a unified strategy and pan-Arab action capable of causing shock and upsetting the equations of balance and the plans and calculations of the enemies. This cannot be achieved without the adoption and use of the other options, as an alternative to the failure and futility of politics and as support for the peace option, which is dead as far as Israel and the United States are concerned. These other options are numerous, diversified, and painful to those who loved the game of gratuitous death, belligerence, violation of international law, bargaining, blackmail, and bloodshed, and who believed they could get away with their appalling crimes for ever and avoid the legitimate response and punishment."

"Why Relieve Israel?"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, warned (6/16): "The Palestinian political crisis might turn into a national, political, and human disaster at any moment if those who add fuel to the fire continue to behave irresponsibly....

"Israel is working to ignite internal strife in the Palestinian territories against the background of the results of the recent Palestinian elections.... From the beginning Israel expressed its dissatisfaction with HAMAS's assumption of power. It announced this and launched a campaign to attack HAMAS and thwart its overwhelming popular victory. It began by imposing a tight siege and withholding aid from the Palestinian people. And, through its American ally, it applied pressure on donor states to stop transferring funds to the Palestinian Authority and, consequently, to the Palestinian employees who are today staging demonstrations demanding their salaries....

"While Israel is feeding Palestinian sedition by all available means, some Palestinian factions are working in a way that makes

Israel more comfortable, through their insistence on creating and stoking a Palestinian political problem and, consequently, placing hard options before the Palestinian government...."

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